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ABSTRACT

Described is the Companion Program at Southern Illinois University, in which undergraduate volunteers serve as friends to self-identified, socially isolated, alienated or lonely students who have a clear potential which they have been unable to realize. Volunteer functions are enumerated: (1) participation in weekly training sessions where effective interpersonal functioning is developed and enhanced; (2) engaging in testing and observational measures; and (3) maintaining reasonable contact with socially isolated peer friends. The quarter-by-quarter development of the program from its inception to the present is elaborated. The author highlights the problems encountered and the resultant changes in the areas of: (1) recruitment and selection of the companion volunteers; (2) their training and the development of training materials; and (3) the search for needy students who would not generally seek help on their own (TL)

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USING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AS HELPERS: THE COMPANION PROGRAM REVISITED[1]

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Basically, the Companion Program as it was first conceptualized by Dr. Raynard, and as it has evolved at Southern Illinois University, involves the use of undergraduate volunteers as friends to socially isolated, alienated, or lonely students who have a clear potential which they have been unable to realize. Through the program the volunteer companion is matched with a lonely student, whom we shall call his friend. In volunteering the companion agrees 1) to participate in a weekly training or resource group meeting, in which he shares with the group his experiences and problems in his relationship with his friend, learns how to be a good friend and how to function effectively in interpersonal situations, 2) to engage in testing and observational measures and 3) to maintain reasonable contact with his socially isolated peer friend. At this point it is up to the companion and friend to develop the relationship in the direction that they together choose. The guidelines for the

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relationship are purposely vague such that the companion and friend have complete freedom to develop the relationship in any manner that they might choose.

In our experience, the fact that an official program is involved makes it more difficult for the companions to establish a friendship relationship, thus emphasizing the importance of giving the companion as much freedom as possible.

The focus of the weekly resource group initially involves the mutual giving of support and dealing with questions such as "How should I make the first contact, by telephone or in person?" "What do I say when I make my first contact?" "What does he know about the program and is he expecting my call?" "Should I tell him about our training group meetings?" Later on the focus shifts toward present concerns in the relationships and learning about friendship through reading materials and sharing of personal experiences. The resource group has typically been found by the companions to be a major part of their total experience in the Companion Program, in terms of personal value for the companions.

The question might be asked, "What is the need or the value of a program such as the Companion Program. The need for selected sub-professionals in the mental health areas has become increasingly acute in recent years. Both available and projected manpower in the disciplines currently practicing psychotherapy falls far short of current as well as projected demands. If the results of the Raynard and Graff (1969) study are at all representative (80% of Southern Illinois University students sampled said they would accept vocational counseling service if offered), the

importance of new methods of serving student counseling needs becomes obvious.

At the same time there appears to be a shortage of professional counselors, a number of investigators have explored the potentially unique advantages of using sub-professional peer counselors (Gordon, 1965; Holzberg, 1963; and Reiff, 1966).

Carkhuff, in his 1968 review, suggested that there was no discernible difference between the degree of positive outcomes of clients counseled by professional and non-professional workers.

Rogers (1957, 1959) implied that therapeutic helping relationships may exist in nearly any human interpersonal relationship situation provided that certain fundamental attitudes are present on the part of one or more of the individuals involved.

In that line, there has recently been considerable interest in, and support for, the therapeutic effectiveness of an intimate friend (Shapiro and Voog, 1969; and Ford and Urban, 1967).

Schofield (1964) witnessed the fact that friendship played an important role in the psychological well-being of an individual; however, the direct nature of that influence has received little research attention.

Similarly, recent investigations by Martin et al (1966), Armstrong (1969), Carkhuff (1968), and Shapiro and Voog (1968) suggested that certain personality or human characteristics are more important than experience as a counselor to facilitation of positive counseling outcome.

One of the goals of the Companion Program has been to identify some of those personality characteristics through the use of

matching of companion and friend on the basis of various personality and social class characteristics.

It is clear from the research cited that there is a need for programs utilizizing trained sub-professionals; there is also evidence of some advantages of using peers as mental health workers due to similarity in social position, skills, and frustrations. Furthermore, meeting the student in his own environment is an advantage not often enjoyed by the professional counselor.

As the Companion Program has evolved our concerns have centered around defining the role of the companion, developing an effective training program, effectively identifying and reaching the target population, matching companion and friend in such a way to enhance therapeutic outcome, and evaluation of our efforts, both in terms of value for the companions and the friends.

Let us now take a look at how the Companion Program has developed quarter by quarter since its inception during the summer of 1969. I will make an attempt to note the changes we have made in the program as it has developed in order to deal with the persisting problems we have encountered. The data concerning the first three terms of the program's existence was taken from a paper presented by Lawrence J. Schneider at the American College Personnel Association Convention in March, 1970, at St. Louis, Missouri.

Summer 1969

During the summer of 1969 Dr. Raynard, as director of the program, served also as the group leader for each of the five groups of companions. The companions during this term were volunteers from a junior level course in personality theory. Of the 77 students enrolled in the course, 33 volunteered to serve as a companion, and 26 remained with the program and fulfilled their major obligations.

One of our initial concerns had to do with the effectiveness of self-selection into a program like this by the companions. What kind of volunteers were we getting? In an attempt to answer this question each of the 26 companions was gived a battery of tests which included the California Psycholgical Inventory (CPI), the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS), and the Mooney Problems Checklist (MPCL).

The mean profiles for the companions on the CPI resembled those for male and female college students in general, except for the companions slightly elevated scores on the social presence, self acceptance, achievement via independence, and flexibility scales, all indicative of a quite healthy social adjustment. It was interesting to note that on the Edwards both sexes scored relatively high on Intraception, a scale intended to measure the need to understand and analyze the motives of others. The Mooney clearly revealed the fact that the companions were not without problems of their own. Female companions acknowledged about three times as many problems of all types as the male companions (mean

of 56.3 and 21.7 respectively). These findings are consistent with those of earlier researchers suggesting that females are more willing to reveal problem areas than are males (Shapiro and Voog, 1969).

We realized very early in the program that students from our desired target population were more difficult to recruit than were the companions. During the first term of operation the friends were mainly foreign students and referrals from Counseling and Testing. This proved to be a very undependable method of recruiting. Consequently, only 14 of the 26 companions were eventually assigned friends to contact. We found that as the quarter progressed, unassigned companions gradually lost their enthusiasm and began to drop out of the program.

One of the most encouraging results from the first term was the confidence we gained with the idea that undergraduate volunteers could self-select themselves into a companion service program. For the most part we found the volunteers to possess adequate emotional resources, social skills, and motivation to successfully fulfill their obligation to the program.

From the beginning of the first term the weekly training group meeting became an integral part of the program, and a useful resource for the companions in dealing with problems in their relationships. At this point, no training materials were used. It became very much a sharing, learning experience for trainer and companion alike. One of the more important questions that came out of these groups was, "How can evaluation be made of

the friend without affecting our relationship?" This has proven to be a difficult question for which we have not really found a satisfactory answer.

Fall 1969

During the fall of 1969, two graduate students joined Dr. Raynard as group leaders. Companions were again recruited from the personality course on a completely voluntary basis. Due to our difficulty in getting enough friends during the summer terms, the Handicapped Student Services, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation were added as referral sources. An attempt was also made to recruit friends by running an ad in the campus newspaper. In response to this ad we received a number of crank calls and only two appropriate friends.

One of the suggestions that came out of the companion training meetings during the summer which we felt was worthy of immediate consideration was that some type of matching procedure be used to pair the companions with the friends that would give cinsideration to the preferences of both parties. With this in mind Dr. Raynard began developing the Good Friend Test on which the companions and friends rated, on a seven point scale the degree of importance they attached to each of 40 attributes of a good friendship. Companion pairs were then matched on the degree of similarity in rating the attributes.

In our program evaluation following the Fall Term, the Companions most often expressed a need for more case discussion and follow-up, more guidelines as to how to deal with specific problems or dilemmas, and more readings and discussions

about friendship. The companions felt that they had been of most benefit in helping their friends to be caring and to show interest in another, in learning to trust someone, and in gaining social poise and adequacy.

We were strongly reminded of our ultimate goal of assessing the value of the Companion Program for the friends by the companions growing concern over what help, if any, they had been to their friends. We were somewhat surprised and rather pleased to note that 73 % of the companions expressed a desire to continue their relationship with their friends into the next quarter, though their commitment to the Companion Program did not extend beyond the Fall quarter. We considered this to be favorable feedback as to the type of relationships which were being formed.

Winter 1970

The winter term 1970 was something of a transition period for the Companion Program. There was actually very little formal evaluation; a considerable amount of time was spent in the revision of the Good Friend Test. The revised test consists of 60 attributes grouped into six categories. These categories are set up in a need hierarchy on the same order as Maslow's formulation. The six levels of needs are: physical, security, approval, esteem, productive and creative. It is Maslow's contention that it is only when lower level needs are met that one can move on to meet needs at higher levels.* We were quite excited with the results and saw this as a viable method of expanding the program and eventually allowing it to become a self-sufficient program in the undergraduate population.

*One of the most significant developments of this quarter was the use, for the first time, of undergraduates as co-leaders of the companion groups.

Several new methods of recruiting friends were attempted during this quarter, none without their shortcomings. Companion "teams" (usually of two people) were organized to meet lonely students in their own environment on campus or anyplace in the city. These teams approached and struck up a conversation with students wherever they met them. This approach seemed to work very well until mention was made of a program. At this point the student often reported a feeling of being manipulated. This problem of the friends being uncomfortable when they find out there is a program involved has been very difficult for us to cope with, particularly in light of our interests in evaluation and research.

During this term, classroom recruiting of friends was tried for the first time. We presented the program to the students in the General Studies psychology course, had them all fill out a biographical data form on which the last question only applied to whether or not they wished to participate in the program. This was to avoid the possible stigma attached to identifying oneself as a lonely student to one's peers. We soon realized that the way the program was presented was a crucial variable. We received a rather heavy response from the students, but found that many of them were emotionally healthy; they seemed to be curiousity seekers, some of them looking for a dating service. At this point we did not refuse anyone who volunteered to participate in the program as a friend. Unfortunately, many of those who would seem to have been more appropriate friends shied away from volunteering. This has been a perrenial problem with the program - effectively reaching the desired target population.

One other method of recruiting was tried during the winter quarter. We went into one of the large campus residence halls and met with the resident fellows on three separate occasions, with the enthusiastic support of the resident counselor. We were seeking referrals from the resident fellows. Those that we did get were good referrals, but we got very few. The RF's, in many cases, saw this as an imposition, just one more thing that they had to do for the institution.

Spring and Summer 1970

For the first time during the spring and summer terms, salaried graduate students served as co-leaders of the companion resource groups, in addition to Dr. Raynard and the undergraduate leaders.

Some of the other innovations of this period involved the offering of a syllabus and dittoed training aids together for the first time. The training aids were paced to meet the needs of the relationship as it developed from week to week, from the point at which the companion made the first contact with his friend and developed a relationship to the point where the relationship was terminated or they decided to continue seeing each other independently of the Companion Program.

The training materials proved to be quite helpful. An indication of the enthusiasm and involvement of many of these undergraduate companions is the fact that a number of them volunteered their time to dictate and edit the new training materials, which involved a considerable investment of time in many cases.

Although we continued to receive occasional referrals to the program from Counseling and Testing and R.C.'s, the only place we actively recruited from this point on was in the classroom. We continued to make quarter to quarter refinements of our appeal or presentation to the students in an effort to solve our persistent problem of recruiting appropriate members of our target population rather than healthy students.

During the Spring and Summer Terms the Companion Program was funded to formally study movement in developing friendships. This was attempted by matching companions and friends on the basis of high, medium and low degrees of similarity on the Good Friend Test and the Inner-Directedness scale on Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory. The most basic hypothesis that could be made from previous research was that a moderate degree of similarity of interpersonal needs and a high similarity of social values makes for the most productive movement.

The outcome measure used during the Spring Quarter was level of openness or self-disclosure in the relationship as measured by number of problems revealed to the companion on the Looney and score on Jourard's Self-Disclosure Inventory using the companion as the target person. In order to make the Looney scores comparable across subjects the friends all completed a Looney checklist at the beginning of the term on which they checked the 30 problems which were of most concern to them. At the end of the term they were asked to count which of those 30 they had discussed with their companion. On both of these instruments, the friend not only reported his level of disclosure to his companion, but also to his other best friend.

We found that, on these measures, the friends disclosed at a significantly higher level to their other best friends than to their companions. Furthermore, there appeared to be very little relationship between degree of similarity of companion pairs and positive outcome. It should be noted, however, that the Spring Term at Southern Illinois University ended prematurely about six weeks into the term. Considering the limited number of contacts that characterized many of the companion relationships, the results were not surprising and were not taken too seriously, particularly in light of the limited sample size; much of the post data was not able to be collected following the abrupt termination of the quarter.

Fall 1970 and Winter 1971

The last Fall and Winter Terms marked the beginning of formal leadership training for undergraduates. We had weekly training meetings for the leaders, and at the beginning of the term prior to assuming leadership duties each of the leaders-to-be participated in an encounter group weekend with the director and graduate student leaders. The results of this experience were quite encouraging, and served as another step in broadening the scope of the Companion Program.

We found it necessary during these two terms to improve our method of recruiting undergraduate leaders. The process of self-selection was not successful in distinguishing between effective and non-effective and, in some cases, damaging leaders. Our present policy is to get recommendations from each of the group leaders

at the end of the term as to whom they feel have good leadership characteristics in their group.

During the Fall Term a completed, bound training manual and syllabus was used for the first time. Again this manual was meant to be useful as a week to week reference for the companions.

Another new method of recruiting friends was tried during the fall term with seemingly more success than any of the other methods we have tried in terms of getting at the target population. Each of the potential friends who volunteered was given a ½hour interview by a screening committee of companions to determine his or her appropriateness for the program. The fact that a greater percentage of friends than during any other term completed the program during the Fall Term serves as possible evidence for the effectiveness of this selection method.

No final summary evaluation or judgment of the Companion Program will be offered here, largely because the program is, today, in as much a state of transition and change as it was during the first few quarters of operation. The Companion Program is and always has been, most importantly, a service to students. Unfortunately, this has often been true at the expense of good research design.

During the evolution of the Companion Program, many major revisions have been made. The companions themselves have been instrumental in providing suggestions for change and have taken an active part in implementing these suggestions. One of these companions who has been involved with the program throughout its development is Bill Grgurich. At this time he will relate to you some things about the

role of the companion as he sees it, the involvement the companions have had in the development of the program, and some of the radical changes which the program has undergone for the Spring Term.

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